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The Mistaken Use of

Punctuation Marks by Some

Arab Writers

Rawi T. Habeeb(Ph . D)

Kerkuk University/ College of Education

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the mistaken use of punctuation marks by some Arab writers.

It tries to shed some light on such mistakes and to propose correct solutions for this problem . Since punctuation is seen as a universal phenomenon , this study tries to suggest that the Arab system of punctuation should be in accordance with punctuation systems in other languages . Hence , the proposed solutions to the Arab system of punctuation are derived from the punctuation system in English .

Besides , it seems that Arab writers differ in using punctuation marks ; therefore , this paper is intended to be a step in the way of inventing a unified system of punctuation in Arabic compatible with punctuation systems in other live languages .

Introduction

This paper deals with the mistaken use of punctuation marks by some Arab writers . It tries to shed some light on such mistakes and propose solutions for this problem . Since punctuation is seen as a universal phenomenon , this study tries to suggest that the Arab system of punctuation should be harmonized with punctuation systems in other languages . Hence , the proposed solutions for suchmistakes are derived from the English system of punctuation .

Besides , it seems that most Arab writers differ in the way they manipulate the various punctuation marks . Sometimes , they use a particular punctuation mark in the wrong place ; other times , they do not use a particular punctuation mark (e.g. a question mark) although it is indispensable . As a result , it has become necessary to diagnose such a problem and offer adequate explanation for that aspect of language study .

In this study , it is hypothesized that the punctuation system is a universal phenomenon . This means that all live languages can make use of the various punctuation marks in the same way .

Besides , it is hypothesized that most Arab writers do not use punctuation marks in the same way . Moreover , it seems that their manipulation of such marks is often haphazard . For that reason , this study tries to offer solutions to these misuses . It also tries to arrive at a unified system of punctuation marks in Arabic compatible to the one available in other live languages .

In this study , the main punctuation marks will be explained with examples on each one . Then , some extracts from some novels written by prominent Arab writers will be analyzed to show the wrong manipulation of different punctuation marks in these extracts . Furthermore , only end punctuation marks and non – end punctuation marks will be dealt with in this study . Enclosing punctuation marks (brackets and inverted commas) and punctuation marks used within the word (apostrophes and hyphens) fall outside the scope of this study . In addition , capitalization is not taken into consideration here since Arabic does not make use of this device in punctuation .

2 . Classification of Punctuation Marks

When we write , we have to use signs or symbols to make our meaning clear . These symbols are called punctuation marks . They have their own meanings , and these meanings " supplement the meanings of words " (Razzak and al Hassan 1981 : 90) .

Punctuation marks help to obviate ambiguity and confusion . To punctuate properly, you ought to be familiar with the proper conventions of punctuation that are widely adopted by the writers of composition . In this study , we will account for two classes of punctuation marks : end – punctuation marks and non – end punctuation marks .

2 . 1 . End Punctuation Marks

End punctuation marks are those used at the end of sentences . They include three marks : full – stops , question marks and exclamation marks .

2 . 1 . 1. The Full Stop (.)

The full – stop (or period) is used to mark the end of a declarative sentence
(statement) , or an imperative sentence (command) which issues its command mildly rather than forcefully (Waldhorn and Zeiger 1981and 96 , Gray et al 1987 : 242) .

It is also used at the end of an indirect question (Jamil , 1989 : 115) . See the following examples :

1. I met George in the market . (statement)
2. Open the window , please . (command)
3. I asked him when he would come back.(indirect question)

Thus , a full – stop is used at the end of a sentence if its meaning is completed
(Salama 2004 : 55) .

2 . 1 . 2 . The Question Mark (?)

The question mark is used after a direct question (See Jamil 1969 : 116 : Temple 1978 : 21 : Ebest et al 2000 : 421) .

Consider the following examples :-

4. Why didn't you oil the machine ?
5. Could you bring me that book ?

A question mark is not used after indirect questions : instead a full – stop is used .

e.g.) 6. He asked why she came quickly .

2 . 1 . 3 . The Exclamation Mark (!)

The exclamation mark is used after exclamatory sentences to express " some kind of astonishment or a sharp outburst or comment " (Al – Nu'aimi and Al- Khayal 1990 : 14) . Furthermore , an exclamation mark is used to point a vigorous interjection or a nominative of address when a strong feeling is present (Waldhorn and Zeiger 1981 : 97 and Gray et al 1987 : 242) .

For Turabian (1987 : 49) , an exclamation mark is used to mark an outcry or an emphatic or ironical comment .

Exclamatory sentences are those which start with such words as ' What ' , ' How ' ,
' Such ' .

e.g.)
7 . How beautiful she is !
8 . What a funny story it was !
9 . Such an amazing spectacle !

Moreover , exclamation marks should be used after imperative sentences .

e.g.)
10 . Don't go !

2 . 2 : Non – end Punctuation Marks

Non – end punctuation marks are those marks that are used " to indicate the relationship and the relative importance of elements within the sentence " (Jamil 1989 : 118).

Waldhorn and Zeiger (1981 : 99) maintain that non – end punctuation marks are used to show that the flow of thought is being interrupted .

Only three non – end marks will be explained in the following sub – sections : the comma , the semi – colon and the colon .

2 . 2 . 1 : The Comma (,)

The comma indicates a short pause . It helps to clarify the meaning of written sentences . Thus , a comma should be used whenever a slight pause is to be made

(Razzak and Al – Hassan 1981 : 98) . The main uses of the comma can be summarized as follows (see Stone 1967 : 169 ; Temple 1978 : 22 ; Gray etal 1987 : 244 and Mustafa 1998 : 472)

1 – It is used to separate words , phrases or clauses in a list (see Salama 2004 : 54).

11 – He was polite , calm , brave and clever .
12 – Although it was raining , she went out .

2 – It is used before and after a phrase or clause in apposition .

e.g.)
13 – Jean , Bill's sister , left for Italy .

3 – It is used before tail questions .

e.g.)
14 – They played well , didn't they ?

4 – It is used to mark off an adjective clause which merely comments but does not limit or define .

e.g.)
15 – The boys , who were fooling , were punished .

5 – It is used after the vocative (Salama 2004 : 54) .

e.g.)
16 – Linda , will you bring me my glasses ?

2 . 2 . 2 : The Semi – Colon (;)

The semi – colon (;) links closely related independent clauses or other grammatically equal sentence elements that are not linked by a coordinating conjunction (Gary et al 1987 : 258 and Ebest et al 2000 : 437) . For Razzak and Al – Hassan (1981 : 105) , the semi – colon should be used when you want the reader to see that the thoughts contained in two independent clauses are closely related . In a sense , semi – colon is also a linking mark . It can show that two or more clauses are linked in meaning . (see also Shaw 1986 : 142 , Al –Nu'aimi and Al – Khayal 1990 : 12) . Eckersley and Eckersley (1960 : 378) argue that a semi – colon is used when we do not want to break the line of thought as would happen if we used a full – stop .

e.g.)
16 – John drove fast ; however , he lost the race .

Finally , a semi – colon is used between two clauses the second of which forms the cause of the first (Al – Nuiaymi and Al – Khayal 1990 : 12) .

e.g.)
17 – They took their overcoats ; it was raining .

2 . 2 . 3 : The Colon (:)

The colon indicates a discontinuity of grammatical construction greater than that indicated by the semi – colon (Shaw 1986 : 146 and Mustafa 1998 : 489) .

The main uses of the colon are :

1– It is used to stand for " as follows as " in :-

18 – There are two types of sounds : consonants and vowels .

2 – It is used to prepare the reader for a second thought contrasting or balanced with the first part of the sentence (Razzak and al – Hassan 1981 : 106) .

e.g.) 19 – Speech is silver : Silence is gold .

3 – It is used to introduce a saying (Salama 2004 : 56) .

e.g.) 20 – John said : " I want to leave " .

3 . Sample Texts

In this section some extracts chosen randomly from several Arabic novels will be considered to see whether their authors have used different punctuation marks correctly or not . The main mistakes in using punctuation marks will be indicated and then some corrections will be suggested so that readers will recognize the effects of these misuses on the meaning of sentences .

١ – وأغمض عينيه وهو يجفف بمنديله جبهته وخديه وعنقه .على حين كانت أمينة تضع المصباح على الخوان .
(Mahfooz Kaşr – ul – Şawq 1948 : 5 – 6) .

In this sentence a full – stop is used to separate the first clause from the second . The full – stop is out of place here since the second clause (على حين .. على الخوان ..) is dependent on the first main clause (وأغمض عينيه ... وعنقه) .

Hence , the full – stop would have been replaced by a comma .

٢- وتود لو تواتيها شجاعتها فتسأله أن يعفي نفسه من الدأب على السهر الذي لم تعد تنهض به صحته بالاستخفاف المعهود قديماً . ولكنها لم تدرِ كيف تفصح عن أفكارها الأسيفة ! (ibid : 5)

In this extract , the two punctuation marks (the full – stop and the exclamation mark) are misused . First , the full – stop should have been replaced by a comma since the second clause (ولكنها ... الأسيفة) is dependent on the first . Secondly , the exclamation mark should have been replaced by a full – stop since there is no exclamatory sentence . The existing sentence is a declarative one .

٣ – ثم نهض ليخلع الجبة والقفطان بمعاونة أمينة ، وهناك بدأ جسمه كالعهد به : طولاً ، وعرضاً ، وإمتلاءاً
... لولا شعيرات اغتصبها المشيب من فوديه ، وعندما أدخل رأسه في طاقة الجلباب الأبيض غلبه
الابتسام فجأةً إذ ذكر كيف تقيأ السيد عبد الرحيم الليلة في مجلس الأنس ، وكيف جعل يعتذر عن ضعفه
ببردٍ أصاب معدته . وكيف تعمدوا أن يعيروه به . (ibid : 6)

In this extract , all the existing punctuation marks are misused . The first comma should have been replaced by a full – stop since the declarative sentence (ثم نهض ... أمينة) ends there .

Further , the colon is not needed here . The same thing can be said about the commas (طولاً ، وعرضاً ، وامتلاءً) since the conjunction (و) is used .

Besides , the dots (…) are not needed here since the subsequent clause (لولا شعيرات ... فوديه) is dependent on the previous one ; a comma would have been more convenient for that purpose . Further , the comma used before the sentence (وعندما ... فجأةً) should have been replaced by a full – stop since we have two completely separate sentences .

Further , the full – stop used before the coordinating clause (وكيف تعمدوا ..به) is also out of place here since the clause is joined with the previous clauses by the coordinating conjunction (و) . Hence , the above extract could be repunctuated correctly as follows :

ثم نهض ليخلع الجبة والقفطان بمعاونة أمينة . وهناك بدأ جسمه كالعهد به طولاً وعرضاً وامتلاءً لولا شعيرات اغتصبها المشيب من فوديه . وعندما أدخل رأسه في طاقة الجلباب الأبيض غلبه الابتسام فجأةً ، إذ ذكر كيف تقيأ السيد عبد الرحيم الليلة في مجلس الأنس ، وكيف جعل يعتذر عن ضعفه ببرد أصاب معدته ، وكيف تعمدوا أن يعيروه به .

In this complex sentence , the three object clauses (كيف تقيأ ... الأُنس) ,

(وكيف ... معدته) and (وكيف ... يعيروه به) should have been separated by commas . We can see that the first and second are separated by a comma , while the second and the third are separated by a full – stop .

٤ – وإنه ليس كل الرجال من يستطيعون معاشرة الخمر إلى نهاية العمر الخ الخ ، وذكر كيف غضب السيد على وجدٍ في دفع الريبة عنه . (ibid : 6)

In this example , a comma is used to separate the first sentence " وإنه ليس ... الخ الخ " from the second " وذكر كيف ... الريبة عنه " . It is clear that a full – stop would have been more appropriate .

٥ – يا عجباً .. ألهذا الحد يعير بعض الناس أهمية لهذه الأمور التوافه ؟! (ibid : 6)

In this sentence there are two misuses of punctuation marks . First , after the exclamation particle " يا عجباً " two dots are used . It seems that an exclamation mark should have been used instead . Secondly , using two marks (a question mark and an exclamation marks) in the same place is inappropriate . Using a question mark only would have been more appropriate since the sentence is interrogative .

٦ – ولكن إذا لم يكن ذلك كذلك ! فلم فاخر هو في صخب الحديث الفاصل بأنه يستطيع أن يشرب حانه دون أن
تضطرب له معدة ؟! (ibid : 6)

Two mistakes are made in this example . First , an exclamation mark is used to separate the conditional clause from the main clause . A comma should have been used instead . Secondly , a question mark and exclamation mark are used together at the end of the sentence . A question mark only would have been more appropriate since the sentence is interrogative .

٧ – واستخفني الفرح فابتسم مني الفم والعينان والقلب ، وتسامت إليها عيناي في شجاعة غير معهودةٍ .
(Mahfooz : al – Sarab : 219) .

In this example , the comma is misused here because we have two sentences and a full – stop would have been more appropriate to separate them .

٨ – ولاحت طلعة حبيبتي بعد اختفاء طويل معذب ، وصرنا أصدقاء نتبادل الابتسام ! (ibid : 219)

Both of the two punctuation marks used in this example are out of place . The comma should have been replaced by a full – stop and the exclamation mark by a full – stop since we have a declarative sentence not an exclamative one .

٩ – ذهبت إلى الوزارة كالثمل . ما أغربكِ يا دنيا . (ibid : 219)

The second sentence is an exclamative one ; therefore , it should have been marked by an exclamation mark ; not by a full – stop .

١٠ – وتمليت الحقيقة التي لا تصدق ، ابتسامة حبيبتي ،١ فقلت لنفسي إن معنى هذا أن أبواب السماء مفتحة
تسح على قلبي هناء ،٢ ولكن لا يجوز أن أجمد أو أن أصمت بعد اليوم ،٣ وفزت بابتسامة أخرى عند الأصيل ، وثالثة في صباح اليوم التالي ،٤ وشعرت بأنه ينبغي أن أقطع الجمود بالعمل الحاسم .٥

(ibid : 219)

In this extract , one may think that we have only one sentence due to the wrong punctuation . In fact , we have five sentences here ; each two sentences should have been separated by a full – stop not a comma . The first sentence is " وتمليت ... ابتسامة حبيبتي " ; the second is " فقلت لنفسي ... قلبي هناء " ; the third is " ولكن لا يجوز ... بعد اليوم " ; the fourth is " وفزت بابتسامة ... اليوم التالي " and the fifth is " وشعرت بأنه ... بالعمل الحاسم " .

Besides , there should be a colon in the first sentence instead of comma . Moreover , the exclamation mark used after the first sentence is misused also , since the sentence is declarative and not exclamations . It should be written as follows :
(وتمليت الحقيقة التي لا تصدق : ابتسامة حبيبتي .) since the colon is used to stand for " as follows " (see section 2 – 2 – 3 above) .

١١ – إن ضحكة واحدة من شبابه المونق كفيلة بأن تجفف نهراً من دموعي !! ما أجمل أن يحمل جثماني عدة ثوان يوم أدرج على طريق القبر . (Abdulla : Şams – ul – Khareef : 193)

In this extract , we have two sentences : the first is a declarative one , and the second is an exclamative one . Nevertheless , we find that the first is followed by two exclamation marks , while the second by a full – stop .

١٢ – وطرق الباب ، ودخل وحيد باسم الثغر متهلل الوجه ضاحك القسمات تفيض من ملامحه سعادة تخضر
منها صحاري الدنيا . (ibid : 194)

In this compound sentence , there are two clauses : the first is (وطرق الباب ... ضاحك القسمات) and the second is (تفيض من ملامحه ... صحاري الدنيا) . In the first clause , commas should have been used between the three adjectival phrases
(باسم الثغر ، متهلل الوجه ، ضاحك القسمات) .

Besides , a semi – colon should have been added between the two clauses since the second clause is an explanation to the first (see section 2 – 2 – 2 above) .

Thus , the extract above can be repunctuated as follows :

وطرق الباب ودخل وحيد باسم الثغر ومتهلل الوجه وضاحك القسمات : تفيض من ملامحه سعادة تخضر منها صحاري الدنيا .

١٣ – ثم أقبل علي وأخرج من حضنه شيئاً فغرت فمي حين رأيته بعد أن أخرجه من غلافه . صورة زيتية لي قدمها هدية لوالده في عيد ميلاده ... أعني عيد ميلاد وحيد !! فقبلته في جبينه ودعوت له وقلت وأنا في
مرقدي : علقها هناك ... هناك بجانب صورة جدك ... سيفعل ابنك هكذا يا وحيد !!
(ibid : 194)

In this extract ,there are several punctuational mistakes . Here we have two sentences . The first sentence is " ثم أقبل ... ... ميلاد وحيد " and the second is " فقبلته في جبينه ... ... هكذا يا وحيد " . In the first sentence, a colon should have been used instead of the full – stop .

وأخرج من حضنه شيئاً فغرتُ فمي حين أخرجه من غلافه : صورة زيتية ..

Besides , there is no need to use the ' double ' exclamation mark at all since the sentence is by no means exclamative . In the second sentence , on the other hand , the direct speech should have been put between inverted commas
(وقلت وأنا في مرقدي : " علقها هناك ... ...") .
Moreover , the 'double ' dots and ' double ' exclamation marks are definitely out of place here .

١٤ – كان كل شيء من حولي يناديني إذا سكن الظلام فإذا ما أجبته سخر مني : التلال .. والشرفة .. واللبلاب ، والسطح ، والسلم ، وكل شيء كأنها كانت الوجود .
(Abdulla Şajarat – ul – Liblab : 127)

In this extract , there are two sentences . The first is ("كان كل شيء ... سكن الظلام ") ; and the second is (" فإذا ما أجبته ... كأنها كانت الوجود ") .

The two sentences should have been separated by a full – stop . Moreover , we see double dots between the first three things and commas between the last three as if the first three differ from the last .This part can be repunctuated as follows :

التلال ، والشرفة ، واللبلاب ، والسطح ، والسلم ...

١٥ – واعتلت صحتي فرأيت أنه من الخير لي أن أرحل عن منزلها هذا وعن مهد الذكريات ، وقد فعلت و
١ ولست أنسى الليلة التي حملت فيها حقيبتي بعد أن سارت بمتاعي عربة صغيرة ، ثم خرجت من عتبة بيتها . لآخر مرة ، ٢ لست أنسى هذه اللحظة لأنني خلت أذيال ثوبها خارجة من بين حديد الإطار وهي
في الشرفة وسمعتها وكأنها تقول : وداعاً .   (ibid : 127)

In this extract , various punctuational blunders have been made . Here , we have three sentences . The first is (" واعتلت صحتي ... وقد فعلت ") ; the second is (" ولست أنسى ... لآخر مرة ") , and the third is (" لست أنسى هذه اللحظة ... وكأنها تقول : وداعاً ").

First , a full – stop , not a comma , should have been used at the end of the first and the second sentences . Secondly , a full – stop is strangely used before the adverbial
" لأخر مرة " in the second sentence .

١٦ – ثم اشتدت بي العلة فاستشرت الطبيب فلم تجدِ المشورة ، قال لي الناس : تغذَ ، وقد قال الطبيب دواؤك
الجوع !!   (ibid : 128)

Here , a full – stop should have been used instead of the comma after the first sentence " ثم اشتدت ... فلم تجدِ المشورة " .

Besides , an exclamation mark should have been used instead of the comma after the imperative clause . ' تغذَ ' (see section 2 – 1 – 3 above) .

Furthermore , the double exclamation marks used after ' دواؤك الجوع ' are misused here since the sentence is a declarative one .

١٧ – لست أدري من منا كان يتملق صاحبه في هذه الفترة الكئيبة ؟   (ibid : 128)

The question mark is misused here since we have an indirect question . A full – stop should have been used instead (See Jamil 1989 : 115) .

١٨ – فإذا كانت هذه هي حالة الدكتور حسن ... فما هي النقطة التي وصل إليها ، والحادث الذي اعترض حياته، وانتهى به إلى هذه الحالة النفسية التي تسبب له نوبات الشلل المؤقت .
(Abdul Kuddus : Bi? r – ul- Hirman : 56)

First , the double dots used after the conditional clause " فإذا كانت ... الدكتور حسن " should have been replaced by a comma . Secondly , a question mark should be used instead of the double dots after the interrogative clause " فما هي النقطة ... الشلل المؤقت " .

١٩ – والمعركة بيني وبين الدكتور حسن – إذا كانت هذه هي حالته معركة طويلة وسلاحي الوحيد فيها ...
الصبر !   (ibid : 59)

In this sentence , some punctuation marks are misused . First , the double dots are not necessary . Secondly , the exclamation mark should have been replaced by a full – stop since the sentence is declarative .

٢٠ – ثم فجأة ، ذات صباح ، سألني : هل أودعت الشيك في البنك .. وعندما صممت على أنه لم يعطني شيئاً ، فتح دولابي الخاص .. فتحه بعنف .. كاد يكسره ..   (ibid : 59)

In this extract , there are several misuses of punctuation marks . First , the direct speech should be put between inverted commas . Then the interrogative sentence should have been followed by a question mark (سألني :"هل أودعت الشيك في البنك ؟ ") .

Furthermore , all the double dots , should have been replaced by a full – stop . Thus ,the excerpt above can be repunctuated as follows :

ثم فجأةً ذات صباح سألني " هل أودعت الشيك في البنك ؟ وعندما صممت على أنه لم يعطني شيئاً ، فتح دولابي الخاص . فتحه بعنف كاد يكسره .

4 – Conclusions

The current study arrives at the following conclusions :

1 – Several Arab linguists use different punctuation marks wrongly . Sometimes , they use certain marks unnecessarily ; other times , they do not use a particular mark although it is indispensable .

2 – Several Arab writers use the various punctuation marks almost randomly . For instance , they may use two different punctuation marks for the same clause type , in the same text .

3 – It seems that Arabic does not have a well – organized and unified system for using punctuation marks .

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د. راوي ترف حبيب

مدرس

جامعة كركوك – كلية التربية

"الاستخدام الخاطئ لعلامات التنقيط لدى عدد من الكتاب العرب"

المستخلص

يتناول هذا البحث دراسة تحليلية للأخطاء التي يرتكبها عدد من الكتاب العرب في استخدامهم لعلامات التنقيط المختلفة كالفارزة و النقطة و علامة الاستفهام و غيرها حيث لوحظ إن عددا من الكتاب العرب يستخدمون عددا من علامات التنقيط في غير مواضعها و يهملون استخدام البعض الأخر في أماكن أخرى على الرغم من أهميتها و عدم الاستغناء عنها لاكتمال المعنى. و بما أن التنقيط هو نظام لغوي عالمي فأن هذه الدراسة تحاول أن تقترح فكرة إن يكون نظام التنقيط في اللغة العربية متطابقا مع أنظمة التنقيط في اللغات الحية الأخرى. لذلك فان الحلول المقترحة لإصلاح نظام التنقيط العربي مشتقة من نظام التنقيط في اللغة الانكليزية . و بما إن هناك اختلاف في استخدام علامات التنقيط المختلفة بين كاتب عربي و أخر فان هذه الدراسة تحاول اقتراح نظام تنقيط موحد و متفق عليه في اللغة العربية. وتقع هذه الدراسة في فصلين رئيسيين يتناول الفصل الأول استعراض مختلف علامات التنقيط و ذكر استخدامها في اللغة. إما الفصل الثاني فيشتمل على مقتطفات من عدد من الروايات العربية المشهورة تبين مدى التباين في استخدام علامات التنقيط المختلفة بين كاتب و أخر و كذلك تبين الاستخدام الخاطئ لعدد من علامات التنقيط من قبل هؤلاء الكتاب و من ثم اقتراح تنقيط بديل لهذه المقتطفات التي تم اختيارها لا على التعيين لإثبات مدى خطورة المشكلة التي تعاني منها اللغة العربية في هذا المجال.